

# ROUNDING UP MAGGIE

By SEWELL FORD

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"Say, who was tellin' you? Ah, gwan! Them sea shore press agents is full of tried eels. Disguises nothin'! Them folks I has with me was the real thing. The Rev. Doc, Akhehead? Not much. That was my little old bishop. And it wasn't any slummin' party at all. It was just a little errand of mercy that got switched."

It was this way: The bishop, he shows up at the studio for his regular medicine ball work, that I'm givin' him so's he can keep his equator from gettin' the best of his longitude. That's all on the quiet, though. It's something I ain't puttin' on the bulletin board or includin' in my list of references, understand?

Well, we has had our half-hour session, and the bishop has just made a break for the cold shower and the dressing room while I'm preparin' to shed my workin' clothes for the afternoon; when in pops Swiftly Joe, closin' the gym door behind him real soft and mysterious.

"Shorty," says he in that hoarse whisper he gets on when he's excited, "she's—she's come!"

"Who's come?" says I.

"S-s-s-s!" says he, wavin' his hands. "It's the old girl; and she's got a gun!"

"Ah, say!" says I. "Come out of the trance. What old girl? And what about the gun?"

Maybe you've never seen Swiftly when he's real stirred up? He wears a corrugated brow, and his lower jaw hangs loose, leavin' the Mammoth Cave wide open, and his eyes bug out like shoe buttons. His thoughts come faster than he can separate himself from the words; so it's hard gettin' at just what he means to say. But as near as I can come to it there's a wide female party waitin' out in the front office for me, with blood in her eye and a self-cookin' section of the unwritten law in her fist.

Course, I knows right off there must be some mistake, or else it's a case of dope, and I says so. But Swiftly is plumb sure she know who she was askin' for when she calls for me, and begs me not to go out. He's for ringin' in up the police.

"Ring up nobody!" says I. "S'pose I want this thing gettin' into the papers? If a Lady Bughouse has strayed in here, we got to shoo her out as quiet as possible. She can't shoot if we rush her. Come on!"

I will say for Swiftly Joe that, while he ain't got any too much sense, there's no other streak in him. When I pulls open the gym door and gives the word, we went through neck and neck.

"Look out!" he yells, and I sees him makin' a grab at the arm of a broad beamed old party, all done up in gray silk and white lace.

And say, it's lucky I got a good memory for profiles; for if I hadn't seen right away it was Purdy Bligh's Aunt Isabella, and that the gun was nothin' but her silver hearin' tube, we might have been tryin' to explain it to her yet. As it is, I'm just near enough to make a swipe for Swiftly's hand with my left, and I jerks his paw back just as she turns around from lookin' out of the window and gets her lamps on us. Say, we must have looked like a pair of batty ones, standin' there holdin' hands and starin' at her. But it seems that folks as deaf as she is ain't no surprise. All she does is feel around for her gold eye glasses with one hand and fit the silver hearin' machine to her off ear with the other. It's one of these pepper box affairs, and I didn't much wonder that Swiftly took it for a run.

"Are you Professor McCabe?" says she.

"Sure!" I hollers; and Swiftly, not lookin' for such strenuous conversation, goes on in the air about two feet.

"I beg pardon," says the old girl, "but will you kindly speak into the microphone?"

"I'll step up closer, forgettin' that I still has the clutch on Swiftly, and drags him along.

"Ah, cheer!" says Swiftly. "This ain't no brother act, is it?"

With that I lets him go, and me and Aunt Isabella gets down to business. I was lookin' for some tale about Purdy—you know, the one that had the half brother we shunted back to Boston?

But it seems like this was a new deal; for she opens up by askin' if I new a party by the name of Dennis Whaley.

"Do?" says I. "I've known Dennis since I can remember knowin' anybody. He's runnin' my place out to Primrose Park now."

"I thought so," says Aunt Isabella. "Then perhaps you know a niece of his named Whaley?"

"I didn't, but I'd be glad to hear of her. She's Terence Whaley's girl, that's right. From Skibbereen four or five years back, after near starvin' to death one so bad. Well, it seems Maggie has worked a couple of years for Aunt Isabella as kitchen girl. Then she got ambitious, quit service, and got a flat-work job in a hand laundry—eight per cent, fourteen hours a day, Saturday sixteen."

"I didn't tumble why all this was worth chinnin' about until Aunt Isabella reminds me that she's president and board of directors of the Lady Pot Wealders' Improvement society. She's one of the kind that spends her time tryin' to organize study classes for bread girls who have different plans for spendin' their Thursday afternoons off."

Seems that Aunt Isabella has been keepin' special tabs on Maggie, callin' at the laundry to give her good advice, and leavin' her books to read—which I got a type of her readin', not—according to rule. But along in the early summer Maggie had quit the laundry without consultin' the old girl about it.

"Aunt Isabella kept on the trail, though, run down in her what she called helpful letters. She kept this up until she was handed the ungrateful letter with a few remarks scribbled across the face. Indictin' that readin' of such stuff gave Maggie a pain in the small of her back. But the worst of it all was, accordin' to Aunt Isabella, that Maggie was in Coney Island."

"Think of it!" says she. "That poor innocent girl, livin' in that dreadfully wicked place! Isn't it terrible?"

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "It all depends."

"Hey?" says the old girl. "What say?"

"Well, we has had our half-hour session, and the bishop has just made a break for the cold shower and the dressing room while I'm preparin' to shed my workin' clothes for the afternoon; when in pops Swiftly Joe, closin' the gym door behind him real soft and mysterious."

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The Rescue Expedition Goes Out of Business With a Low, Hollow Plunk.

Ever try to carry on a debate through a silver salt shaker? It's the limit. Thinkin' it would be a lot easier to agree with her, I shouts out, "Sure thing!" and nods my head. She nods back and rolls her eyes.

"She must be rescued at once!" says Aunt Isabella. "Her uncle ought to be notified. Can't you send for him?"

As it happens, Dennis had come down that mornin' to see an old friend of his that was due to croak; so I figures it out that the best way would be to get him and the old lady together and let 'em have it out. I chases Swiftly down to West 11th-st., to bring Dennis back in a hurry, and invites Aunt Isabella to make herself comfortable until he comes.

She's too excited to sit down, though. She goes pacin' around the front office, now and then lookin' me over suspiciously—me bein' still in my gym suit—and then seizin' up the sportin' pictures on the wall. My art exhibit is mostly made up of signed photos of Jeff and Fitz and Nelson in their ring costumes, and it was easy to see she's some jarred.

"I hope this is a perfectly respectable place, young man," says she. "It ain't nothin' pulled by the cops," says I.

Instead of calm in her down, that seems to stir her up worse'n ever. "I should hope not," says she. "How long must I wait here?"

"No longer'n you feel like waitin', ma'am," says I.

And just then the gym opens, and in walks the bishop that I'd clean forgot all about.

"Why, I was lookin' for the bishop to say somethin' sophtin'; but hanged if he don't chime in and admit that it's a sad case and he'll do what he can to help."

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"Wurrah, wurrah!" says he, "but this do be a black day for the Whaley! It's the McGulgan blood comin' out in her. What's to be done, mum?"

Aunt Isabella has a program all mapped out. Her idea is to get up a rescue expedition on the spot, and start for Coney. She says, "Dennis ought to go; for he's Maggie's uncle and has got some authority; and she wants the bishop to do any prayin' over her that may be needed."

"As for me," says she, "I shall do my best to persuade her to leave her wicked companions."

Well, they was all agreed, and ready to start when it comes out that not one of the three has ever been to the island in their lives, and don't know how to get there. At that I sees the bishop lookin' expectant at me.

"Shorty," says he, "I presume you are somewhat familiar with this—er—wicked resort?"

"Not the one you're talkin' about," says I. "I've been goin' to Coney every year since I was old enough to toddle; and I'll admit there has been seasons when some parts of it was kind of tough; but as a general proposition it never looked wicked to me."

That kind of puzzles the bishop. He says he's always understood that the island was sort of a vent hole for the big sulphur works. Aunt Isabella is dead sure of it, too, and hints that maybe I ain't much of a judge. Anyway, she thinks I'd be a good guide for a place of that kind, and prods the bishop on to urge me to go.

"Well," says I, "just for a flier, I will."

So, as soon as I've changed my clothes, we starts for the iron steamboats and plants ourselves on the upper deck. And say, we was a sporty lookin' bunch—I don't guess. There was the bishop, in his little flat hat and white choker—you couldn't mistake what he was—and Aunt Isabella, with her gray hair and her gray and white costume, lookin' about as giddy as a marble angel on a tombstone.

Then there's Dennis, who has put on the black whip cord Prince Albert he always wears when he's visitin' sick friends or attendin' funerals. The only festive lookin' point about him was the russet colored throat hedge he wears in place of a necktie.

Honest, I felt sorry for them suds slingers that travels round the deck singin' out, "Who wants the waiter?" Every time one would come our way he'd gets as far as, "Who wants—"

and then he'd switch off with an "Ah, cheer!" and go away disgusted.

All the way down the old girl had her eye out for wickedness. The sight of Adolph, the grocery clerk, dipplin' his back into a mug of froth moves her to sit up and give him the stony glare, while a glimpse of a young couple scugglin' up against each other along the rail almost gives her a spasm.

"Such brazen depravity!" says she to the bishop.

By the time we lands at the iron pier she has knocked Coney so much that I has worked up a first-class grouse.

"Come on!" says I. "Let's have Maggie's address and get through with this rescue business before all you good folks is soggy with sin."

Then it turns out she ain't got any address at all. The most she knows is that Maggie's somewhere on the island.

"Well," I shouts into the tube, "Coney's something of a place, you see. What's your idea of findin' her?"

"We must search," says Aunt Isabella, prompt and decided.

"Mean to throw out a regular drag net?" says I.

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She does. Well, say, if you've ever been to Coney on a good day, when there was from fifty to a hundred thousand folks circulin' about, you've got some notion of what a proposition of that kind means. Course, I wasn't goin' to tackle the job with any hope of gettin' away with it; but right there I'm struck with a pleasant thought.

"Do I gather that I'm to be the Commander Peary of this expedition?" says I.

"Well," says I, "you know you can't carry it through on hot air. It takes coin to get past the gates in this place."

Aunt Isabella says she's prepared to stand all the expense. And what you suppose she passes out? A green five!

"Ah, say, this ain't any Sunday school excursion," says I. "Why, that wouldn't last us a block. Guess you'll have to dig deeper or call it off."

She was game, though. She brings up a couple of tens next dip, the bishop adds two more, and I heaves in one on my own hook.

"Now understand," says I, "if I'm headin' this procession there mustn't be any hangin' back or arguin' about the course. Coney's no place for a quitter, and there's some queer corners in it, but we're lookin' for a particular party, so we can't skip any. Follow close, don't ask me fool questions, and everybody keep their eyes skinned for Maggie. Is that clear?"

"They said it was."

"Then we're off in a bunch. This way!" says I.

Say, it was almost too good to be true. I hadn't more'n got 'em inside of Dreamland before they has their mouths open and their eyes popped, and they was so rattled they didn't know whether they was goin' up or comin' down. The bishop grabs me by the elbow, Aunt Isabella gets a desperate grip on his coat tails, and Dennis hooks two fingers into the back of her belt. When we lines up like that we has the fat woman takin' her first camel ride pushed behind the screen. The barkers out in front of the dime attractions takes one look at us and loses their voices for a whole minute—and it takes a good deal to choke up one of them human cyclones. I gives 'em back the merry grin and blazes ahead.

First thing I sees that looks good is the wiggle-waggle brass staircase, where half of the steps goes up as the other comes down.

"Now, altogether!" says I, feedin' the coupons to the ticket man, and I runs 'em up against the liver restorer at top speed. Say, that exhibition must have done the rubbernecks good.

"First we was all jolted up in a heap, then we was strung out like a yard of frankfurters; but I kept 'em at it until we gets to the top. Aunt Isa-

bella has lost her breath and her bonnet has slid over one ear, the bishop is red in the face, and Dennis is puttin' like a freight engine.

"No Maggie here," says I. "We'll try somewhere else."

No 2 on the event card was the water chutes and while we was slidin' up on the escalator they has a chance to catch their wind. They didn't get any more'n they needed, though; for just as Aunt Isabella has started to ask the platform man if he'd seen any thing of Maggie Whaley, a boat comes up on the coals, and I yells for 'em to jump in quick. The next thing they knew we was scootin' down that slide carvas at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, with three of us holdin' on to our hats, and one lettin' out forty squeals to the minute.

"O-o-o-o-o-o-o!" says Aunt Isabella, as we hits the water and does the bounce-in' bounce.

"That's right," says I, "let 'em know you're here. It's the style."

Before they've recovered from the chute ride I've hustled 'em over to one of them scenic railroads, where you're yanked up feet first a hundred feet or so, and then shot down through painted canvas mountains for about a mile. Say, it was a hummer, too! I don't know what there is about travelin' fast, but it always warms up my blood, and about the third trip I feels like sendin' out yelps of joy.

Course, I didn't expect it would have any such effect on the bishop; but as we went slamm'n' around a sharp corner I gets a look at his face. And would you believe it, he's wearin' a reg'lar breakfast food grin! Next plunge we takes I hears a whoop from the back seat, and I knows that Dennis has caught it, too.

I was afraid maybe the old girl has fainted; but when we brings up at the bottom and I has a chance to turn around, I finds her still grippin' the car seat, her feet planted firm, and a kind of wild, reckless look in her eyes. "We did that last lap a little rapid," says I. "Maybe we ought to cover the ground again, just to be sure we didn't miss Maggie. How about repeatin', eh?"

"I wouldn't mind," says she.

"Good!" says I. "Percy, send her off for another spile!"

And we encore the performance, with Dennis givin' the Donnybrook call, and the smile on the bishop's face growin' wider and wider. But I've done them same stunts with a gang of real sportin' men, and never had the half of it.

After that my crowd was ready for anything. They forgot all about the original proposition, and tackles anything I leads them up to, from bumpin' the bumps to ridin' down in the tubs on the tickler. When we'd got through with Dreamland and the steeples, we wanders down the Bowery and hits up some hot dog and green corn rations.

By the time I gets ready to lead 'em across Surfave, to Luna Park, it was dark, and about a million inebriated had been turned on. Well, you know the kind of pictures they gets their first peep at. Course, it's nothin' but white stupa and a color leaf and electric light, with the blue sky beyond. But say, first glimpse you get, don't it knock your eye out?"

"Whist!" says Dennis, gawpin' up at the front like he meant to swallow it. "Is ut the blessed gards we're comin' to?"

"Magnificent!" says the bishop.